

The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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BELFAST, JULY 1st, 1888.

[For Gratuitous Circulation.

THE Rev. J. C. Street will be glad to receive contributions in aid of the gratuitous publication of the *Chronicle and Index*.

ANY one desirous of having for distribution tracts, bearing on the various phases of Unitarianism, may have them on applying to Rev. J. C. Street, 16 Queen's Arcade, Belfast.

THE Rev. W. Reynolds, B.A., late of Mountpottinger, has entered upon his duties as minister of the old and energetic congregation at Ainsworth, and has had a warm and encouraging reception by his new parishioners.

THE Annual Flower Service will be held in the Church of the Second Congregation, Belfast, on Sunday afternoon, July 8th, at 4 p.m. We want plenty of flowers, and many tasteful hands to work in making the building as beautiful as possible. Send us flowers—and come to help us on Saturday to put them into their places.

THE Remonstrant Synod, and the Non-Subscribing Association, have just held their meetings in Belfast. The former body was most concerned about a recent bequest to its Sustentation Fund, and the way in which the interest thereof should be expended; and the latter, after a little talk about expelling one of its constituent congregations, in settling about the establishment of a plan for educating orphans. This is the best and most useful work ever undertaken by the Non-Subscribing Association, and it deserves to be crowned with success. It has already enlisted a good deal

of sympathy, and should command the support and co-operation of every minister and member of our churches.

THE Annual Meetings of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, and the Sunday School Association in London, were certainly not injured by the recent great Conference held in Leeds. On the contrary, it seemed as if both in attendance and in spirit the London meetings were the gainers. From the fine opening sermon of Professor Carpenter's, to the enthusiastic gathering at the Sunday School breakfast, every thing went on with animation, earnestness, and good feeling; and every one present seemed to derive encouragement from the proceedings.

IN consequence of the death of the Rev. John Dickson, another of our Irish congregations is deprived of the services of a minister. We are in need of ministers for Moneyrea, Mountpottinger, Glenarm, 2nd Ballyclare, and Moira. The Meeting Houses at Ballymena, Carrickfergus, and Limavady are closed. We need a good deal of stirring up at present.

THE Senior Wrangler this year is Mr. W. M^cF. Orr, of St. John's, who was educated at the Methodist School and Queen's College, both in the capital of Ulster. Mr. Orr, who is only twenty-two years of age, has been no less distinguished for his athletic feats, having carried all before him in the Cambridge University bicyclist races. Mr. Orr belongs to Comber, and is the son of Mr. Blackley Orr, of the Unitarian Congregation of that town, and is himself a Unitarian.

In the Classical Tripos at Cambridge, standing *first* is the name of Herbert D. Darbishire, son of Herbert Darbishire, Esq., of the Second Congregation, Belfast. Mr. Herbert D. Darbishire is also an earnest Unitarian.

We congratulate these young men. They have won splendid positions, and there is a brilliant future for them. We also congratulate their parents and friends, who must be proud of their successes.

OUR Scotch friends are to be congratulated. A sum of about £35,000 has just been left, the interest of which is to be applied to the spread of Unitarian principles in Scotland. All missionary work in that country has been impeded through lack of funds; now a grand opportunity presents itself, and there is little doubt that our friends of the Scottish Association will avail themselves of it to the uttermost. We wish them God-speed, and congratulate them upon the grand possibilities of useful work now open before them.

A MAJORITY of the Committee of Manchester New College recommended its removal to Oxford. There is much to be said in favour of the recommendation. But how about the hope of many that our various Colleges might all be united? Could this be done if we remove one of them to Oxford? At present our efforts are too much scattered, and our work does not yield the results that would be gained if our efforts were more concentrated. Go to Oxford if you like, but go unitedly, and with as much strength as possible.

MESSRS. SWAN, SONNENSCHN & Co. have just published another of the Rev. Alfred Hood's useful manuals for young people. The one just to hand, neatly printed and bound, is on "The Lord's Prayer for Young People," and is well worthy of the attention of teachers and parents. Each petition of the prayer is dealt with separately, and in a way that is very attractive. The expositions are simple and effective, and the literary and poetic illustrations are both apt and tasteful. The author's desire that he may help the young

people in "their endeavour to spread the Kingdom of God among men" seems likely to be fulfilled, for no one can rise from the perusal of his pages without feeling better, and more wishful to enable others to work and pray for the coming of God's Kingdom upon the earth.

ANOTHER of the "historic men" of our Free Churches has passed away at a ripe age, and in the full splendour of his powers. James Freeman Clarke, of Boston, U.S.A., the friend of Parker, Emerson, and Longfellow; the fellow-worker of Garrison, Wendel Phillips, and Frederick Douglass; the eloquent supporter of every good cause, has closed his earthly career. Great as a theologian, foremost in philanthropies, and devoted as a pastor, he has filled up the measure of a well-rounded career, and has entered into the blessed life. Though dead, he will long continue to speak to us.

WE extract the following from the *Jewish Standard*:—

"The whirligig of time is notoriously responsible for many strange revenges. But the irony of history has assuredly never been more curiously demonstrated than in the latest phase of the story of Babylon—Babylon the mighty, the oldest town in the world, where once our ancestors dragged the chains of slavery, by the waters of which they 'sat down and wept when they remembered thee, O Zion.' Little thought the Babylonian kings, whose palace covered eight miles, and whose hanging gardens were among the wonders of the world, that long after their race and dynasty had crumbled away, the despised people of Judea would still survive and inherit the gate of their enemies. Yes, almost the whole district of Hilleh, with its rich meadows and gardens, its palm-groves and its pastures, and, consequently, nearly the entire town of Babylon, once the residence of Nebuchadnezzar, is now in the possession of two Jews! These new princes of Babylon are two cousins, named respectively Menachem Suleiman Daniel (Effendi), and Menachem Salach Daniel. Not the least curious thing about this freak of fortune is, that the name of

the present masters of Babylon should be that of the prophet who attained to distinction even in the times of the captivity, and at the court of Nebuchadnezzar himself. That monarch, of graminivorous fame, if he could wake from his long sleep of centuries, might well be tempted to exclaim, in an unconscious quotation from Shakespeare—"A Daniel come to judgment, yea, a Daniel."

THE following is being circulated in tract form as the programme of Christianity. Very good! How far is it also the programme of Judaism? Are the two religions one?

To preach Good Tidings unto the Meek:

To bind up the Broken-Hearted:

To proclaim Liberty to the Captives, and the opening of the Prison to them that are bound.

To proclaim the Acceptable Year of the Lord, and the Day of Vengeance of our God.

To comfort all that mourn.

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion.

To give unto them—

Beauty for ashes,

The Oil of Joy for Mourning,

The Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness.

HOW I LEFT ORTHODOXY.

BY JAMES C. STREET.

"LIGHT THROWN ON THE PAST. ITS UPRISING
TOWARDS GOD."

No. 8.

"Nor deem the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain;
If, rising from its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain."

LONGFELLOW.

"You, young men, and you, maidens, are living in the morning which thousands of nobler natures than you desired to see, and died without the sight. You are beginning your life at a period when the disclosures of divine love will set aside the mists and darkness of days gone by. Do not pervert your opportunities, but reverently, conscientiously, earnestly accept the glowing, growing truths, and work out in yourselves a higher standard

of duty, a nobler aspiration, a diviner manhood. Arouse your spiritual instincts, and at the call of the Divine Teacher awake to discern the signs of the times, and to see in the face of the sky the promise of God's coming day."—*H. W. Beecher (Evolution, Vol. I., p. 24).*

These are the words of Henry Ward Beecher, addressed to his congregation in one of his latest discourses on Evolution and Religion. They indicate the attitude which he thought the young men and maidens of the present age should assume in regard to the new lights which science and observation are causing to shine upon many of our old controversies and difficulties. I take them as indicating the course which I also think the inquirers after truth in this age should take.

In the course of my preceding lectures, I have set before you frankly and truthfully the pathways of my mental and spiritual history until I reached certain great conclusions about God, Predestination, the Bible, Authority, Christ, and the future condition of the children of men. Each new step I took on my journey led to another, and I insensibly but steadily left many a beaten track, and found myself amid new scenery and fresh conditions, until my spiritual landscape was completely altered, and my outlook was towards a new Heaven and a new Earth.

So far I was a wonderful gainer. I had travelled out of the shadow into the sunshine. Storm-clouds and muttering thunder were behind me. Ghosts, fears, and superstitions had taken their flight. The grip of fate was unloosed; nemesis no longer looked grim and relentless; I could breathe freely; my eyes were not afraid to look up to God; my heart had no fear of what He might feel or do; I could throw myself confidently upon His love, and feel sure that whatever took place I was absolutely safe in His hands.

And now, having reached this vantage ground, I had time and desire to look around me, to see whether anything further could be revealed to my inquiring spirit. By this time I had become sensible that truth was not only always harmonious, but that it was closely impacted and held together without break or flaw. I

knew that not only could it not be contradictory, or self-destructive, but that, instead, it was always and absolutely in agreement with itself, and that every fresh portion of it, as it was discovered or comprehended by the mind of man, helped to illustrate and explain other portions which had seemed to be obscure or in apparent diversity.

The new light I had already gained made me eager to employ it in my further search for what was true. Sometimes, perhaps, I grew impatient and wanted to get too comprehensive a sight at once; but I was soon checked in this, and I learned to say, with J. H. Newman—

“Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.”

I had now moved *forward* many steps, and every step had added to my knowledge, and made my way clearer. I now felt it to be necessary, if not to take a *step backward*, at all events to *look* more keenly into the past, that I might discover if any new light had been thrown upon its dark places.

All through my religious history, I had found myself turning again and again to that old story of the creation and fall of man, which lies at the base of all Christian theology, and necessitates such ingenious machinery on the part of God to counteract the evil which had been done by His children. Milton's picture of the first pair was wonderfully attractive:—

“Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native honour clad,
In naked majesty seem'd lords of all,
And worthy seem'd; for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone,
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,
(Severe, but in true filial freedom plac'd)
Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd;
For contemplation he and valour fram'd,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him.”

All this, and all similar literature, implied, and indeed definitely taught, that man was created perfect—like unto God Himself—and that his career, after the first unhappy and fatal step, had been ever downwards into deeper degradation and ruin. The whole machinery of bibles, prophets, saints, Saviour, and atonement had been called into existence to counteract this

terrible fall, and to provide an escape for the unhappy descendants of this most guilty pair. I found that everyone around me believed in the original innocence, and in the immediate fall of man. I find that most people around me now believe it. Our poor human nature is spoken of as lost, depraved, sinful, rotten to the core, without any trace of goodness, and without any natural hope of purification and soundness. Some of the most awful pictures in literature are those describing the loathsome condition of man. For a long time I myself had unreservedly adopted these opinions. I employed the common language in speaking of human nature. I understood that unless some Divine and supernatural agency stepped in all mankind must be irretrievably lost. All this comported with my early beliefs about God, Predestination, and Hell. These doctrines all held together, and were parts of a whole. But most of these had dropped from me, as Autumn leaves drop from the trees; they no longer formed any part of my theological creed. They were left behind me, with the follies, ignorances, and blunders of childhood and youth. I had not yet had time to see how these changes in some of the articles of my belief affected others. The doctrine of the Fall of Man had not yet challenged my scrutiny, and I had tacitly, but not intelligently, accepted it. But now I began to ask myself how such a doctrine could be true if I was right about a Universal Father—all-powerful and all-loving—and a brotherhood of man which reached through all times, and bound the nations and tribes of the earth in the bonds of unity. It was time to look *this* question fairly in the face, and examine it in the light of the new revelations which had been made to me.

I soon found that more was involved in this question than might at first appear. If man was indeed utterly fallen, then all my conclusions were in error, and God was not what I believed, nor were His ways those which I have described. On the other hand, if there had been no fall, not only were my conclusions about God correct, but all the ingenious theories, schemes, plans, and arrangement of the theologians might be unreservedly thrown

aside, for they were out of place, uncalled for, and unnecessary.

It was high time, therefore, as well as gravely important, that I should seek for some light on the past.

On turning to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, I found a few scattered passages which might be taken to imply that man had been originally created perfect, and that he had fallen from that high estate, and passed into a phase of degradation. But on the other hand, I speedily found that the whole tone, scope, and purport of these Scriptures was in quite an opposite direction, and that they were full of appeals, exhortations, encouragement, and aspiration, showing the belief that whatever else might have taken place, there was a prevailing belief among the writers of these Scriptures that man's nature was capable of appreciating and aiming after what was good and holy, and that it could be stirred up to noble deeds, and inspired to divine excellencies. Running through these books was the assumption that man's nature was noble, that it was capable of growth, that it could ever learn new lessons, that it was not crushed down into one dead level of sin and degradation, but rose from time to time even to saintly holiness, and to the loftiness of the true sons of God. This made me feel that even on *Scriptural* ground we had all been building most insecurely; we were upon the shifting sands instead of upon the everlasting rock. I soon found that the *Scriptural* argument was untenable.

Even tradition would not give an unqualified testimony in favour of this doctrine. I could not find that human traditions generally were favourable to it. True, there was a sort of looking back to some golden age of the past, some sunny time when the world's skies were brighter, and its rewards were more generous; but I could not find accompanying this any belief in the absolute fall of man, and his irremediable ruin. When I wanted this tradition, I found it was narrowed down to a very precise region, and that it could be easily encompassed and defined. It did not exist among the Jews; the nations outside Judaism were ignorant of it. But when we came into the

region of Christian times, and books, and history, it began to appear; and as the schoolmen, and philosophers, and dialecticians got into the high places of the Christian Church, it gradually condensed itself into a definite dogma, and out of it speedily grew the schemes and systems of theology which have long enthralled the Christian world, and which science, culture, reason, and conscience are combining to overthrow. Had tradition been uniform and unbroken in its testimony, I should have been compelled to assign to it great weight, even though I could not have accepted it as of binding authority; but when it appeared that general tradition was against it, and that even Christian tradition was by no means absolutely concurrent, I came to the conclusion that along this line of evidence I should gather nothing which would establish the dogma of the fall and ruin of man.

When I took the question for solution to the world in which I lived, and tried it by the court of observation among mankind, I was by no means convinced that it was true. Here, on all sides of me, were evidences that however fallen man might be, he was certainly not without redeeming qualities. He could be gentle, forbearing, self-sacrificing. He could suffer for others, he could deny himself, he could resist temptation. Every day's observation, even amongst the most worldly and sinful of those around me, proved to my mind that men were by no means utterly depraved, that there was a soul of good in things evil, and that were forces at work which were continually warring against all that was evil. I found my old theories slipping away from me, and that there was need for a careful revision of my theological position. There were so many purely human agencies at work which were in the direction of upwardness, progress, and growth that there began to dawn upon me the half-conscious idea, that instead of man falling he was certainly making wonderful efforts to rise. I know that this was contrary to all my former notions; and I hesitated long, as I had ever done before coming to any opposite conclusion. But I noted the rise of this thought in my mind, and watched it as it gradually

developed. One thing grew clear to me—that the field of observation did not lead me to any confirmation of my early belief in the downfall of man.

Experience put in its claims to be heard in the court of appeal before any final decision was reached. Now there is a sense in which the life of any man may be said to be an epitomy of the life of the world. That which goes to make up the character of any individual certainly goes to make up the lives of other individuals. The world of humanity is only a collection of individuals. Their lives are, in the main, but copies of each other. There are differences, no doubt, which separate each from each, and leave a stamp of individuality in which the separateness of souls can reveal itself, but beneath all this there is so much that is common, and belongs to all, that we occupy solid ground when we say that “one life may stand for all,” and that from an individual we may reason to the race. So I fell back upon myself, without presumption or vanity, or without my feeling that I was acting egotistically, in order that I might find out what is the real condition of the human race. As I did so, I certainly could not fall back upon any primitive perfectness. So far, it might be said, I was only discovering the truth of the old doctrine, for I was only a unit in the race, and the race had fallen. How could I expect to find any period of my life when I was perfect? I did not expect to find this, and I was not disappointed when I found it was not there. I found readily enough periods of innocence, but I also found that there were periods of ignorance. I was not justified in considering innocence and holiness as identical. While holiness involved the idea of innocence, innocence by no means involved holiness. Before I could appreciate what holiness meant, I found it was necessary, as the Bible fable said, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Without knowledge I could not discriminate. But as knowledge increased, I did not always find that innocence remained. Simplicity and innocence, in some respects, drifted from me, and my nature and experiences became more complex. I found forces

warring against each other. I recognized a clearer sense of what was good and evil, and I soon began to make my choice. So, as I looked into myself, and failed to find a period of perfection, so also did I utterly fail to find a period when evil satisfied me, when it was my good, when I took it by preference, or when I found myself by choice selecting it as the ordinary condition of my life. I sinned, I chose the evil, I stooped below my ideal from time to time, but never without a sense of shame, a pang of remorse, and an eager desire not to transgress again. Moreover, I saw within myself, not simply a *capacity* for growth and improvement, but an earnest *desire* for it. I sought out opportunities; I met with persons whose companionship would do me good; I read the best books at my command; I heard every man who came near me and seemed to have anything to say that could help me; I tried to be religious. Besides all this, I found stirring within me a desire to be useful to others. I worked with and for others. I helped to establish useful societies; I laboured in every reform—anti-slavery, temperance, peace, political progress, education. I took an active part in teaching as well as learning. I aided in the establishment of literary and progressive societies, and in many ways used what powers I had, not simply for myself, but for others. I became an enthusiastic worker. Whatever seemed to be for the welfare of any individual or of all individuals interested me. I studied the rights and duties of man; and I found myself trying earnestly, honestly, and faithfully to do what I could to make the world better. I am not telling this to cause you to fix your thoughts upon me, or to make you think that I was any better or any worse than the people who were round about me, but simply that through my story of experience you may see how I dealt with this question of the fall of man. I could not find in myself any proof of the truth of that doctrine. There was misery and sin enough, God knows; but there was something else that was neither misery nor sin,—a sense of joy, a love of goodness, which at all events were as natural to me as my misery and sin. If there was shadow there

was also sunshine. There was the tolling monotone of pain, but there was certainly the happy sound of joy-bells. If I experienced a sense of sin, I also thrilled with the delights of holiness. Now these experiences of mine could hardly be unique. So far as I knew I was in nature like others. Many had happier and brighter surroundings than mine had been; many had opportunities of culture and development which never were accessible to me; and most of the sons of men were favoured at least as much as I had been. I could not think that my mental and moral nature differed in kind from theirs. The same hopes and fears, loves and hatreds, aims and aspirations, were shared by us all; and I could not doubt that every one else as well as myself had within the heart a love of what was good, noble, and uplifting. What then could I do with this doctrine? Once again I felt stirring within me, and now with greater force, the thought that man's life was no downward course ever to a more terrible depth of sin, but an upward striving after greater purity.

So far, I had carried on my investigations through the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures—through the long paths of Tradition; through the powers of observation brought to bear upon the world in which I lived; and through the experience of my own life—and on all sides I had failed to find the evidence which would support the dogma of man's fall from an original state of perfection. Instead of this I had found reason to ask myself whether the evidence did not all point in a contrary direction, and whether the truth might not be that, instead of falling, man had ever been rising, and that his career had been ever towards a sublimer perfection.

This idea took a strong hold upon me. It startled me by its novelty, and it attracted me by its beauty. As I began to think about God, and especially as I looked at Him in the light of the great love wherewith He loveth us, this thought seemed more in keeping with His nature, and more worthy of His character. Besides, it seemed like a great flash of light thrown upon a dark region, and it appeared to give a clue to much of the mystery with which the story of the world in early days was shrouded. It illumined dark ages and events, and it made the past alive with new meanings. It was only right, therefore, that I should examine it carefully, and decide cautiously.

Happily the scientific literature of the day, which was accessible to me, came in to render great aid in the study of my problem. I found there were enquirers in the field who, without any theological purpose, were diving into ancient records, tracing the history and growth of words, following up to their source thoughts and illustrations, reading the stories of rock, and ice and river, making the dead past tell its history, and causing even the running streams to sing the story of their lives; and it soon appeared that in going back we got farther away from culture, development, and religion, and into twilight regions where man was a child, thought was in infancy, and art was unknown, and where humanity could be dimly seen emerging out of darkness and barbarism, and groping its way into clearer light and growing civilization. At first, this seemed to confirm the belief that man had suffered a tremendous fall, and that the degradation which was found in the records of rock, and river, and cavern, was appalling evidence of this great catastrophe. If it were indeed true that, as we traced the story of a man backward up the stream of time, we came upon ever new and startling evidence of his ignorance, barbarism, savagery, and brute nature, then would not all this make confirmation doubly strong that man had been created perfect, but that by some act of sin he had brought upon himself and all his posterity all this appalling misery and degradation? But was not this assuming the very thing to be proved? Where was the evidence of this originally perfect creation? Where could we gaze upon this archetypal man? What proofs were producible that such a state of things had ever been? It was certainly not enough to cite a few scattered passages in some old literature, or to tell the fables of ancient days, as though they were infallible utterances from the lips of Deity. There was no infallible book; no man could speak with authority; a church could never have the fitting credentials.

(To be continued).

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